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ABSTRACT

The Lucy Flower Technical High School was the only Chicago public high school exclusively for girls. Its founders' goal was to train young women both for sex-segregated employment and for their "primary function" as housewives. The form this aim took in practice and the response to the school over time by Chicago's young women offer suggestive insights into the following: the realities of vocational education for women in the United States; the value of single-sex in contrast to coeducational education for women; and the interaction of the schemes of educators with the needs and wishes of women students. Although boys' vocational education has been criticized for in effect keeping the sons of workers in the working class, at Lucy Flower the hidden agenda of limitation by class was subordinate to the overt agenda of limitation by gender. There was never any question that the school meant to prepare women for the limited roles society allotted them. Yet, this intention was not carried out as a matter of simple imposition. As an open enrollment institution, the school was able to pursue its vision of women's destiny only to the extent that a readily available clientele shared its philosophy. Thus, the composition of its student body followed the physical and cultural movements of groups in Chicago, vividly reflecting attitudes toward schooling and work on the part of young women and their families. (Author/KC)

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Gender Tracking and Student Choice: Case Study of a Girls' Vocational High School, 1911-1978

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Gender Tracking and Student Choice
Case Study of a Girls' Vocational High School, 1911-1978

The Lucy Flower Technical High School was the only Chicago public high school exclusively for girls. Its founders' goal was to train young women both for sex-segregated employment and for their "primary function" as housewives. The form this aim took in practice and the response to the school over time by Chicago's young women offer suggestive insights into: the realities of vocational education for women in the United States; the value of single-sex in contrast to coeducational education for women; and the interaction of the schemes of educators with the needs and wishes of women students.

Boys' vocational education has been criticized for in effect keeping the sons of workers in the working class. At Lucy Flower the hidden agenda of limitation by class was subordinate to the overt agenda of limitation by gender. There was never any question that the school meant to prepare women for the limited roles society allotted them. Yet this intention was not carried out as a matter of simple imposition. As an open enrollment institution, the school was able to pursue its vision of women's destiny only to the extent that a readily available clientele shared its philosophy. Thus the composition of its student body followed the physical and cultural movements of groups in Chicago, vividly reflecting attitudes toward schooling and work on the part of young women and their families.

The announcement of the opening of the Lucy Flower Technical High School for Girls in 1911 prompted enthusiastic rhetoric from Chicago's newspapers. The Record Herald called the notice "a clarion call in the advancing army of the 'woman movement,'" and claimed it would "mark a revolution in Chicago's educational attitude toward the problem of woman's work."1

In the sixty-seven years that followed, Chicago's only public high school for girls hardly had a revolutionary impact, yet a study of its history raises important questions: How has the training of women for sex-segregated employment worked in practice? How do the schemes of educators interact over time with the needs and wishes of female students? What is the value of single-sex as opposed to coeducational schooling for women?

The first of these issues has received the most attention from historians. A number of researchers have recently investigated work-related education for women in the early twentieth century.2 Much less is known about the interaction of student wishes with educational policy, since historians have generally focused on plans and attitudes enunciated at the top. Finally, single-sex versus coeducational education for women at the high school level in the United States has not been evaluated because it has been so unusual; coeducation has been unquestioningly accepted as beneficial for both sexes.

This paper addresses these broad issues in the context of the history of one school, a history that is necessarily local, reflecting not only the context of the times but the human geography of Chicago.3

The "woman movement" was at a high point in 1911, with unprecedented numbers of women practicing medicine, earning Ph.D.'s, and taking an active role in civic life. The status of women of all social backgrounds was a matter of concern to the few at the top, including Ella Flagg Young, Chicago's first (and only, until 1981) woman Superintendent of Schools and one of the city's most effective and humane educators. Young was aware that thousands of girls and women in Chicago had to work outside the home and believed they deserved a school equal to the two well-established Chicago boys' technical high schools, to prepare them for more than traditional "needle and stove" jobs.4

Young had few models to turn to. Some cities had established "trade" schools for adolescent girls, usually providing instruction in the use of power sewing machines, but these schools offered little academic work. The Boston Girls' High School of Practical Arts and the Washington Irving High School in New York, both founded a few years earlier, were closer to Young's idea for Chicago. Dora Wells, Young's choice to head the Chicago girls' high school, visited Boston and New York in search of ideas. Given prevailing attitudes about "women's work," however, it proved impossible to construct a "technical" curriculum that was in any way equivalent to the curriculum at

Crane and Lane Technical High Schools for boys, which concentrated on advanced math, science, and technical shop skills.

In spite of a degree of rhetorical boldness about women needing remunerative skills, Lucy Flower's founders endorsed the dominant view that employment for women must necessarily be a temporary expedient, of secondary importance to their life-long calling of homemaking. Dora Wells proposed to begin by teaching traditional women's skills and then to expand into any field in which there was a demand for women workers; a number of times she mentioned photography and typesetting, but neither subject ever appeared in the curriculum. More surprisingly, Wells opposed teaching at Lucy Flower the skills that truly revolutionized women's work in the early twentieth century--typing and stenography. (She relented and added business courses in 1917 because the school had "unaccountably" not grown as expected, but eliminated them ten years later when the school moved to its own, specially built building.) Instead she combined "household science" with a traditional academic program and declared the resulting education "Technical." Her view of the matter, and the core of the school's curriculum, endured for more than forty years.5

Meanwhile, students and parents had their own ideas of what use the new school would be to them, and these ideas shaped enrollment and to a degree curriculum over the years. Until the late 1960s, neighborhood school boundaries for high school students in Chicago were firmly fixed, and Lucy Flower was the

only public high school open to girls from all over the city. Because Lucy Flower represented a choice for students, its history offers a view spanning more than half a century of what young Chicago women, including those who chose not to attend Flower, wanted from their high school experience.

Until 1921, Illinois law required school attendance only up to age fourteen, and most working-class girls and boys left school before finishing the eighth grade. Thus in its early years Flower served two different groups of girls. Most of its students were needed by their families to work at home or on jobs by the time they were fourteen or fifteen, but a gradually growing minority of families could afford to keep daughters at home until they married, or even to send them for further training to become nurses or teachers. For the first group the school offered "pre-vocational" training to overaged girls in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and "vocational" training in dressmaking and millinery in a two-year high school program. For the minority, there was the "technical" program consisting of traditional college preparation along with housekeeping skills.

Perhaps because it included the latter group, Lucy Flower retained in the teens and early 1920s elements of the academic high school of the turn of the century. Two members of the original faculty were men who followed the nineteenth-century pattern in which high school teachers identified more closely with college professors than with teachers of younger students. One of these, Willard Clute, published twenty-six books on botany, including one based on his work at Lucy Flower--Agronomy:

a course in practical gardening for high schools. In the preface to this book, Clute acknowledged the aid of his colleague, Professor Downey, the Math teacher at Lucy Flower.6 Dora Wells herself was a Wellesley graduate who had studied eight years of Latin and seven of Greek, had a Master's Degree in political science from the University of Chicago, and had taught not only in high school but at the Chicago Normal School.7

Yet along with serious academic pretensions Dora Wells espoused the Deweyan view that "the school is not a preparation for life. The school is life."8 In both the vocational and academic programs at Lucy Flower an effort was made to relate one course to another and to make all the work as practical as possible. Preparing for the 1924 senior class play, French students translated Moliere's Bourgeois Gentilhomme, sewing classes made costumes, and art classes constructed sets.9 Mr. Clute entered into the spirit of learning-by-doing in his botany course; his students' gardens flourished, though to get them started the girls had to battle "a waste of tin cans, bottles, ashes, and unfertile soil."10 Miss Wells was particularly proud of the school lunchroom, which was run at a modest profit by students under the supervision of a "household science" teacher.

Nationwide, the vast majority of high-school students of the teens and twenties attended for only one or two years, and only a tenth of those who entered Flower in those years completed the four-year course.11 Many students had substantial home responsibilities while in school and could look forward to more

of the same, or a factory job, when they left, so their years--or months--at Flower represented in part a happy prolongation of girlhood. They were attracted to the school by the active classrooms where they learned to cook and sew, making hats and dresses they could wear and designing pillow-covers, cross-stitched bags, and costumes that were displayed in the main hallway. (Such a curriculum did not suit everyone. A young woman who was sent to the school by her parents against her wishes made such an "awful" hat that she left it on the streetcar on the way home!)12

Students were <u>not</u> attracted to the school during its first sixteen years by its physical facilities. Ella Flagg Young wanted a school for girls comparable to the well-equipped technical schools for boys, but in fact the girls had to be content with cast-off buildings and limited equipment. Flower's first home, the old South Division High School, had been declared unsuitable for a school in the 1890s when the elevated was built along Wabash Avenue.13 Of necessity all conversation stopped when a train went by. According to a student of that era, a move became imperative when the chimney was blown over in a winter storm, breaking through the roof and scattering bricks down the main stairwell.14 In a different vein, a complaint to the School Board alleged that the school was "right in the heart of the so-called 'red light' district."15 So in 1915 the school moved to the old Carter Elementary School building at 61st and Wabash, which Ella Flagg Young's successor called "an isolated part of the city."16 The building was only marginally an

improvement since it had not been planned for vocational work and was so small that classes had to be held in portables on the playground. By 1926 the pre-vocational classes were moved to their own building, and Lucy Flower had 530 high school students--in contrast to the 9400 enrolled in the boys' technical high schools.17

In December 1927, the school was reborn, with its own specially planned new building on the edge of Garfield Park. Miss Wells was thrilled. There were rooms full of sewing machines and stoves, special rooms for child care and beauty culture, and a dining room and sitting room for entertaining. The building reveals what Wells and the teachers who shared in the planning valued for girls' education, and also what they rejected: there were no rooms for business machines, typesetting, or photography, no swimming pool, and no athletic fields. The new school physically embodied a particular view of women's educational needs, combining an emphasis on an idealized middle-class notion of home-making with a severely limited conception of training for employment.

It was a tremendous success. By 1934, Flower had 3400 students, was operating on double shifts, and had to take steps to reduce enrollment. Of course it was not just its programs, or even its beautiful new building that led to Lucy Flower's dramatic growth at this time; other Chicago high schools expanded too as the Depression reduced job opportunities for young people and the city's adolescent population grew. But Lucy Flower grew faster than other high schools, and a happy congruence of student

wishes with school programming contributed to its exceptional popularity in the 1930s.

Because enrollment at Lucy Flower was open, the composition of its student body over the years sheds light on attitudes toward the schooling of adolescent girls. An examination of student records indicates that attendance at the school was closely related to the ethnicity, stage of acculturation, and economic status of the students' families.

In the teens and twenties, when high school students generally came from financially secure families, Lucy Flower had modest success in appealing to that small percentage of middle class girls who were interested in its curriculum and of working-class girls who not only were interested but could persuade their parents to let them continue their schooling. Describing the students in 1914, Dora Wells said "Most come from comfortable, well-ordered homes, few from homes of wealth or poverty."18 The fathers of a few students in the early years were lawyers and businessmen, but more commonly they worked as skilled tradesmen, postal workers, janitors, and laborers. Most white students were of Northern European origin. In 1911 and 1912, a social worker at the University of Chicago Settlement House tried without success to persuade parents living in the Stock Yards district, only a few miles southwest of the school, to send their daughters to Lucy Flower. The recent immigrants of the neighborhood (Poles, Germans, Bohemians, Irish, and Slovaks) saw little reason to keep daughters in school beyond their confirmation in the Church.19

By contrast, South Side and even a few West Side black families sent their daughters to Lucy Flower from the beginning, and by 1927 almost half of the student body was black. Like white students, though generally at a less affluent level, black girls came from a range of economic circumstances--from the children of Ida Wells-Barnett to those of waiters and drivers. The motivation of black girls for attending the school was a bit different from that of whites. While they too were attracted by the practical curriculum, they were also looking for an alternative to the increasingly black, crowded Wendell Phillips High School.20

Flower Tech's new location on the West Side, along with the increasing acculturation of Chicago's immigrant communities, altered the ethnic makeup of the school. Black enrollment, which had grown over the early years of the school along with the growth of the black South Side community, dropped to less than 5%.21 Enrollment of the daughters of immigrant families increased dramatically. By the late 1920s, sending daughters to high school, at least for a few years, was seen as an option by families who earlier had rejected schooling for adolescent girls. Especially in the West Side Italian and Polish communities which were now easily accessible to Lucy Flower, the school's emphasis on homemaking and its all-girl status appealed to protective parents. At the same time, fewer girls of Northern European origin attended.22

There is substantial evidence, however, that location was not the only factor in the decisions of young people and their

families about attendance at Lucy Flower. As has been noted, in the school's early years the recent immigrants living near the South Side Lucy Flower did not send their daughters to the school. On the West Side, the school was situated only a few miles from the predominantly Jewish community of North Lawndale, but a search for graduates of the school that located over eighty graduates turned up only one Jewish woman, and she had lived not in North Lawndale, but farther east, in the poorer, older Jewish section around Maxwell Street.23

Just as proximity was not a guarantee that girls would be attracted to Flower, distance did not discourage many who chose to attend. In the street car era, students came from almost all parts of the city to attend the school. Many white students came from the newly-built "bungalow belt" that extended across the Northwest and Southwest Sides of the city. Black students came from the South Side, travelling longer distances than most of their white classmates, in search of what they perceived as a "better" school than their local ones, and black enrollment grew slowly but steadily through the 1930s and 1940s.

At the new school, many students continued to choose the two-year vocational curriculum well into the 1930s, knowing they couldn't afford to stay in high school for four years and hoping their training might help them find a job. This curriculum still consisted of millinery and dressmaking, and it now offered work preparatory to beauty culture training. During the Depression, a few Flower students did find work in these fields. Many, however, had to take unskilled work in factories, or found no

steady work at all and stayed at home until they married. A 1932 survey of the Chicago Public Schools conducted by George Strayer found, in fact, that there was little relationship between technical courses taught in the schools and the needs of Chicago industries for trained workers, and recommended that Flower reorganize its courses so as to prepare girls "for industrial occupations requiring a high degree of skill."24

If Dora Wells and her successor, Sophie Theilgaard, were aware of this recommendation, they kept it to themselves. Far from seeking out remunerative new skills to teach, the school moved away from preparation for employment during the 1930s, stressing even more emphatically than in the 1920s the value of training for intelligent homemaking. Theilgaard wrote in 1938: "Earlier technical education was specialized preparation for a vocation. Today, the term signifies general education with specific emphasis on development of proficiency in homemaking."25

Lucy Flower aimed to make "ladies" out of lower middle class and working class girls--or at least make good housewives who knew what was meant by being a lady. Since the status of being a lady has never been supported by the lady's own employment, teaching for the "industrial occupations requiring a high degree of skill," as recommended by Strayer, would have introduced a jarring note at the Lucy Flower of the 1930s.

Many high school students of the 1930s felt lucky to be in school at all, and found in the new Lucy Flower High School a vision of order, propriety, even elegance. A graduate of the class of 1937 recalls her first visit to the school: "Everything

about the school was beautiful, and people were so respectful it was just like a sanctuary."26 The walls were hung with copies of famous paintings, and large and active art and music departments introduced students to a new world. Students learned to make hats and to wear gloves, and to speak in well-modulated tones. Girls not accustomed to table-mats, silver, and china, were taught to set a table and to entertain graciously; by turns they invited their favorite teachers for lunch, learning not just to prepare and serve the meal but to greet their guest correctly and make appropriate conversation.

This preparation for middle-class homemaking was popular for a number of years despite the fact that most two-year and four-year graduates of Flower looked for jobs when they left school. Essentially, these young women--and their parents--agreed with the school's founders that training for the woman's long-run future of homemaking should take precedence over job skills. The result was a curious situation in which girls who wanted to be sure of a reasonably good job on graduation chose not the "technical" high school, but their local comprehensive high school where they could learn business skills, and some mothers objected to their daughters' attending Lucy Flower on the grounds that it was impractical!27

Lucy Flower High School attracted its largest student body in the 1930s, when its distinctive character strongly appealed to new groups of high school students. After 1940, the school's enrollment plummetted. In part this was the result of a trend felt in all Chicago high schools. As a consequence of a low

birth-rate during the Depression years, compounded by the post-war exodus to the suburbs, Chicago high school enrollment in 1950 was only two-thirds of what it had been ten years before. But just as Flower's gain in the thirties had been more dramatic than that in the system as a whole, its loss in the forties was also more extreme. In a five year period from 1939 to 1944 the size of the school fell by one-half, and further declines brought its student body in 1953 to 790, less than one-third of its size in 1939.28

There were two major reasons for Flower's declining popularity in the 1940s. One was that its character as an all-girls' public school, which had appealed to many parents in the 1930s, was no longer so important. With the greater prosperity of the war years, more Catholic families could afford to send their daughters to Catholic girls' schools.29 At the same time, with assimilation to the mores of their new country, many immigrant families felt less threatened by coeducation. For example, a 1938 graduate's parents wanted her to go to a girls' school because "in those days Italian girls couldn't go any farther from home than our mothers could see us;" but by the time her younger sister finished the eighth grade, "things had changed" and the younger girl went to the local coeducational high school.30

The other reason for Flower's enrollment decline during the 1940s was its continued commitment to a curriculum that appealed to diminishing numbers of young women. It had been popular because it suited many girls who were more serious about

preparing for marriage than about preparing for a job; but during the 1940s, women's expectations about employment outside the home were changing. World War II opened up new opportunities for employment both in office work, which growing numbers of Flower graduates had entered in the late 1930s, and in skilled industrial jobs.

The experiences of two women who learned trades at Lucy Flower in the 1930s illustrate the changes the war made in women's work lives. Immediately after graduation from the two-year millinery course in 1930, Mary Staver went to work as a milliner at Marshall Field's for $5.00 per week, making medium-priced hats that sold for $7.50. After eleven years on the job, making increasingly elegant hats, she had worked up to $18.00 per week--still making less in a week than the price of one of her hats. In 1941 she gave up millinery and went to work in a war factory where she was trained on the job as a welder and earned $80.00 per week![31] Bernice Tabisz, a four-year graduate of the class of 1937, worked in industrial sewing for six years, using the skills she had learned at Flower, but by 1943 she had married and her husband was in the service. Thinking that office skills would be more transportable than sewing, she learned to type, and in fact, wherever she followed her husband she found that office jobs, but not sewing jobs, were readily available.[32]

Of course after the war the women welders and rivetters lost their high-paying jobs and were encouraged to stay at home and leave "men's work" to men, but a fundamental change had occurred. The increased family incomes experienced during the war led to

higher expectations, and the expanding service sector of the economy offered opportunities for women workers. The result was a steady increase in the percentage of employed homemakers and a reduction in the proportion of women who worked only until they married. This change led to a greater concern on the part of young women--and their parents--for education that would contribute to employment opportunities.

The most attractive jobs for young women in the 1940s and early 1950s were in offices, and students at Lucy Flower would have liked to prepare for these by taking business courses. But a succession of principals, along with the school's home economics teachers, resisted the introduction of business training on the grounds that it would irrevocably alter the distinctive character of the school. Not until 1954 did the school introduce business courses, a change perhaps prompted, as in 1917, by a shortage of students. The fears of the home economics teachers for their department were proven correct. Over the next twenty years, the business curriculum steadily cut into the popularity of advanced home economics courses, with the "better" students generally choosing business. Though a year of basic home economics was still required for all freshmen, the home economics department, which had included thirty-one teachers at its peak in 1939, was reduced to four by 1970.

Many students felt that the school had finally caught up with the times. For years, Flower graduates had been going into office jobs, learning the necessary skills on their own, on the job, or in night school; now they could go with skills in hand.

In spite of the success of its business programs, however, Lucy Flower never regained the enrollment it had had in the 1930s. One reason for this is that business courses were, after all, hardly unique to Lucy Flower; they were available in all the city's comprehensive high schools. Another crucial factor was racial change on Chicago's West side during the 1950s. The West Side's black population, very small when the school moved there in 1927, had gradually increased over the years, and the East Garfield Park Community Area was 17% black in 1950. With the massive influx of Southern blacks to the city in the fifties and the displacement of thousands of blacks from the South Side by urban renewal, that percentage rose to 62 by 1960, and the residential area immediately surrounding the school was entirely occupied by blacks.33 This change reduced the school's ability to attract students from the whole city and to compete for status within the school system. In 1956, without consultation with the school's administration, the central office changed the name of the school from "Technical" to "Vocational"--a change that faculty and students alike saw as down-grading the status of the school.34

Thanks to its open-enrollment policy and its continued reputation as a well-ordered school, Lucy Flower changed racially more slowly than its neighborhood. The available evidence suggests that black enrollment remained virtually stable from 1940 through 1955, but that the precipitous decline in the number of white students during the 1940s (before racial change in the area) meant the percentage of black students increased from about

15% in 1940 to about 50% in 1955. When Chicago high school enrollments began to climb again in the early 1960s as the baby boom generation reached high school, the majority of new students at Flower were black, but white enrollment declined only gradually. By 1963, Flower had grown again to over 1800 students; of these 25% were white.35 In a city where most schools have been racially segregated, Lucy Flower had the distinction of being integrated from its opening in 1911 until the late 1960s, by which time the last white seniors graduated and no new white students enrolled.

Throughout the school's history, black students had chosen to go there because it represented an alternative to their local, segregated high schools. (In another article I consider in more depth the experience of black students at Lucy Flower.) During the late 1950s and early 1960s, when many Chicago high schools were attempting to cope with racial change, both white and black students often chose Flower instead of their turbulent area schools.

The students who chose Flower as an escape from their local schools felt they were going to a school with its own positive appeal. The spirit of the school and many of its programs continued remarkably unchanged through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. A finishing school atmosphere continued to be the school's goal. A graduate of the class of 1968 says "there was a certain snobbery about going to Lucy Flower. There was still a gloss about it. We were young ladies and we were smart."36

Meanwhile, changes in the school system--the loosening of

local residency requirements for high school students in the 1960s and the opening of magnet high schools in the 1970s--meant that Lucy Flower was no longer the only all-city alternative school open to girls. Having lost that unique status Lucy Flower steadily lost enrollment, and in 1978, under pressure from the Title IX requirements of the Federal Government, the school began to admit boys.

In the United States, except for a few cities on the Eastern seaboard, coeducation has been the unquestioned rule in public schools. The assumption has been that girls and boys educated in the same schools would receive the same education, and therefore that American schools were appropriately equalitarian.37 Since coeducation has been so strong both in ideology and in fact, scholars have not examined it critically. On the rare occasions when educators have questioned it, they have been concerned with its negative effects on boys.38

In Britain, on the other hand, a change to coeducation as part of the recent trend toward comprehensive secondary schools has caught the attention of educational sociologists, and their research has raised serious questions about the negative effects of coeducation on girls. A recent study in a secondary school found that both sexes saw boys as "the focus of activity and attention," especially with regard to exchanges initiated by the teacher.39 When schools have become coeducational, the academic performance of boys has improved while that of girls has declined.40 Though coeducational schools typically offer

more science courses than do all-girls' schools, girls choose science less often in mixed schools.41 Girls in mixed schools have fewer role models in leadership positions; when schools become coeducational, administrative and faculty leadership roles pass into the hands of men.42

Of course the extension of these conclusions into the American setting can be no more than suggestive. In addition, since the curriculum at Lucy Flower was intentionally female-oriented, the school cannot be used to compare girls' curricular choices in the way that British schools can. At the same time, the school differed from other Chicago high schools in significant ways that clearly follow from its all-girl status, and these differences led to a high school experience that was more rewarding for many students than that of their contemporaries in coeducational schools.

Most importantly, females set the tone of the school; it was "theirs" in a way that was not possible in coeducational schools, where adult and student culture were dominated (as in British schools) by males. While the tone was stereotypically feminine, it allowed students to take themselves seriously in ways that were impossible in mixed schools. Flower students from all periods of its history believe that they were more serious about their studies than friends at coeducational high schools. They lived with female leadership. They experienced opportunities for leadership themselves and for participation in sports and other activities that were monopolized by boys in mixed schools. They were free from male pressures for "feminine" behavior and

established strong and important ties with other women.

The status of sports at Lucy Flower was markedly different from the status of girls' sports in coeducational schools. Beginning in the 1920s, high school teams all over the country became a focus for school and community loyalty. Indeed some Flower students felt they didn't go to a "real" high school because they had no real--i.e., male--school teams to cheer for. The Chicago Public Schools, following the current view that intense competition was unhealthy for females, did not permit inter-scholastic athletics for girls.43 Intramurals, however, were allowed, and attracted wider participation at Lucy Flower than at coeducational schools, where resources and attention were concentrated on boys' teams. Girl athletes, rather than being stigmatized as unfeminine, were generally admired. Volleyball and "captain basketball" tournaments between classes, particularly in the exceptional years when the juniors upset the seniors, could leave the school in a not very ladylike uproar.44

In other extracurricular activities as well, Lucy Flower's all-girl character was significant. American high schools in the 1920s and 1930s, faced with an influx of students who earlier would have gone to work at fourteen, developed elaborate systems of extracurricular activities to promote "citizenship." Such programs tacitly reinforced traditional sex roles, giving positions of authority to males and tasks of support to females. When students elected class or school officers, they chose a boy as president and a girl as secretary. When school administrators

appointed fire marshals and members of safety patrols, they chose boys; when they needed help in the office or library, they recruited girls. In "Flower City," by contrast, not only was the Mayor a girl, but girls constituted the safety patrol and fire patrol (in 1939 Flower's Fire Marshal was the only girl Fire Marshal in the city), produced the school paper, and made up a swing band.45

In the matter of adult leadership, coeducation in Chicago has had effects similar to those currently being observed in Britain. Flower's first principal, Dora Wells, was the first woman principal of a Chicago high school. It was fourteen years after her appointment before a woman was made principal of a coeducational high school, and to this day women have never headed more than one-fifth of Chicago's high schools.46 In addition to an all-female administrative staff, Flower for many years had women teachers of math and science--in fact, during the 1930s and 1940s it had no men teachers of any subject.

Many Lucy Flower students, even those who at first felt their parents were heartless to send them away from boys, valued these features of an all-girls' school. They recall that in certain respects it was more relaxed not having boys around. You didn't have to be afraid of being laughed at for asking "certain questions" in class. There was none of the competition for boys' attentions that typifies girls' lives in coeducational schools. There was a closeness and camaraderie among the girls they think would have been missing at a coed school.

Graduations were the occasion for tears. In 1938 each

graduate walked down the aisle carrying a single rose (girls wore formal dresses rather than caps and gowns, until the year the principal completed her Ph.D. and decided that she and everyone else would appear in academic regalia). For many years the graduation ceremony began with a procession of seniors singing "Pomp and Circumstance" and ended with the audience waiting in the auditorium while the stage curtains slowly closed and the new graduates marched to the main lobby, joined hands and sang Auld Lang Syne. "I said I wouldn't cry," recalls one graduate, "But you look around and see someone crying and pretty soon you're crying too. After all, you've been so close to these girls and now you don't know if you'll ever see them again."47

Vocational education in high schools has been criticized for two alleged failings: it is always, necessarily, out of date; and it imposes a limited future on the students for whom it is planned. In the debates on these issues, women are mentioned only parenthetically, and the history of the Lucy Flower school suggests that the standard criticisms need to be modified when women are considered.

Like boys' schools, Lucy Flower taught skills that were anything but on the forefront of the economy's needs; to the contrary, for many years the school found it hard to concentrate on economic needs at all. Women were not taken seriously as part of the money economy, and traditional skills were thought more important for them to learn than modern ones--how to take care of a family rather than how to earn money.

Boys' vocational education has been criticized for having the hidden agenda of keeping the sons of workers in the working class. At Lucy Flower the hidden agenda of limitation by class was subordinate to the overt agenda of limitation by gender. There was never any question that the school explicitly and proudly intended to prepare women for the limited roles society allotted them. Yet this intention was not carried out as a matter of simple imposition. The school was able to pursue its vision of women's destiny only to the extent that a readily available clientele shared its philosophy. The fact that it was an open-enrollment school meant that it adapted itself (albeit slowly) to student needs in order to survive. The ebb and flow of enrollment, and the use of the school, particularly by black students, for purposes not included in the plan, demonstrate that high school students are not merely the passive recipients of planners' intentions.

Students are subject, however, to many pressures from the society besides those of the schools. The "woman movement," which had peripherally influenced the founding of Lucy Flower, went into a long period of somnolence from the passage of Women's Suffrage in 1920 well into the 1960s. Families, churches, the economic system, and the increasingly pervasive mass media united in support of a subordinate role for women. Lucy Flower was no exception to this rule; but given that limitation, its unique contribution during its period as an all girls' school lay in its positive support for the dignity of ordinary women.

Notes

1. The Sunday Record-Herald, Sept. 3, 1911.

2. Lisa Fine, "Clerical Education in Chicago: 1900-1930," paper presented to the History of Education Society, October 19, 1984; John L. Rury, "Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women's Education in the United States, 1880-1930," History of Education Quarterly 24 (Spring 1984), pp. 21-44; Leslie W. Tentler, Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; Janice Weiss, Educating for Clerical Work: A History of Commercial Education in the United States Since 1850, Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1978.

3. Major sources of the research on which this paper is based include official record cards of students who attended Lucy Flower from its founding until 1978 and interviews with ex-students, graduates, ex-teachers, and current teachers and administrators. A random sample of 850 was drawn from the approximately 22,000 record cards of students who attended the school for at least one year between 1911 and 1972. (I am indebted to the Office of Student Records, Chicago Board of Education, for permission to examine these cards and to the staff of the Department of Micrographics for their assistance in carrying out the project.) Record cards include the dates of the student's attendance, birthplace, address, father's first name, and during the 1930s and 1940s a photograph of the student. The parents (usually fathers) of 65% the students in the random sample for the years 1911 to 1930 were listed in the Chicago City Directories so it was possible to determine the parents' occupations. In all periods, addresses were useful in determining or corroborating race and ethnicity. Interviews were conducted with 80 graduates and ex-students, approximately 15 from each decade from 1917 to 1978.

4. E.F. Young, 57th Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools of Chicago, 1911, p. 92.

5. Sunday Record-Herald Sept. 3, 1911; Dora Wells, "The Lucy Flower Technical High School," School Review 22 (Nov. 1914), p. 614; Dora Wells, "Flower's Early History is Complete as Old School Moves to New Building," Flower Echo (June 1932), p. 3, cited by Edward J. Kosell, A Historical Study of Vocational Education in the Chicago Public Technical and Vocational High Schools, 1917-1963, Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University, Chicago, 1965.

6. Willard N. Clute, Agronomy: A Course in Practical Gardening for High Schools. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1913.

7. The Daily News, April 3, 1925; Dora Wells, "Outline of Educational Career," typescript, c. 1935.

8. Wells quotes this remark in her School Review article.

9. Interview, Rosemary Fratto (class of 1924), Sept. 13, 1983.

10. Chicago Evening Post, Feb. 7, 1913.

11. Student Records, Chicago Board of Education.

12. Jeanne Rappoport, personal communication, Oct. 1983.

13. 39th Annual Report of the Board of Education, 1892-93, p. 222.

14. Interview, Gladys King Howard (class of 1917), June 25, 1983.

15. Mrs. Florence Vosbrink, at Board of Education Meeting, quoted in the Chicago Record Herald, May 1915.

16. 62nd Annual Report of the Board of Education 1916, p. 7.

17. Enrollment Records, Chicago Board of Education, 1926.

18. School Review 22 (Nov. 1914), p. 619.

19. Louise Montgomery, The American Girl in the Stockyards District, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913, p. 60. See also David Hogan, "Education and the Making of the Chicago Working Class, 1880-1930," History of Education Quarterly 18 (Fall 1978), and J. Bodnar, "Materialism and Morality: Slavic-American Immigrants and Education, 1890-1940," Journal of Ethnic Studies 3 (Winter 1976).

20. Interviews, Willetta Yates Greer (class of 1922), Sept. 13, 1983; Mattie Lee Abbott Fluker (class of 1925), Sept. 23, 1983.

21. Some ex-teachers and students have suggested that the West Side site was chosen because of its inconvenience for black students.

22. Sophie A. Theilgaard, Development of Curriculum with Ninth Grade Pupils of Flower High School, Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1939, p. 129.

23. By contrast, large numbers of Jewish boys attended Crane Technical High School, which was also on the West Side. Apparently the boys' technical school, with its emphasis on advanced math and science, was perceived as sufficiently academic, while the girls' technical school, with its emphasis on homemaking, was looked down upon by the upwardly mobile families of North Lawndale.

24. George D. Strayer, Report of the Survey of the Schools of

Chicago, Illinois, New York: Teachers College, 1932, Vol. III, p. 226.

25. Development of Curriculum, p. 17.

26. Interview, Bernice Ziaja Tabisz (class of 1937), Nov. 14, 1983.

27. Interviews: Maxine Perry Johansen (class of 1932), Dec. 12, 1983; Virginia Meyer Leman (class of 1937), Nov. 15, 1983.

28. Enrollment Records, Chicago Board of Education, 1939-1953.

29. Interview, Mae Citta Cipriani (class of 1938), Jan. 30, 1984.

30. See James W. Sanders, The Education of an Urban Minority: Catholics in Chicago, 1833-1965, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 191-192.

31. Interview, August 31, 1983.

32. Interview, Nov. 14, 1983.

33. Philip M. Hauser and Evelyn M. Kitagawa, Local Community Fact Book for Chicago, 1950, Chicago, 1953; Evelyn M. Kitagawa and Karl E. Taeuber, Local Community Fact Book for Chicago, 1960, Chicago, 1963.

34. Interview, Ruth Stewart, Assistant Principal, Lucy Flower School, Nov. 21, 1983.

35. Theilgaard, Development of Curriculum, p. 127; Lucy Flower school yearbooks: 1943, 1956, 1963.

36. Interview, Leanita McClain (class of 1968), Oct. 13, 1983.

37. Like other educators of her time, Ella Flagg Young believed that coeducation was "preferable in ethical practice to the segregation of boys and girls," but she felt that the special needs of technical training could be met more effectively in separate schools.

38. J.E. Armstrong, principal of Englewood High School in Chicago in the early years of the century believed that coeducation exposed boys, especially in the first two years of high school, to discouraging competition with their more mature female age-mates. Unable to keep up, boys lost interest in school and dropped out. Armstrong experimented with segregation of the sexes in academic classes for the first two years of high school, and reported that for the years 1906 to 1910 segregation was effective both in improving boys' scholarship and in holding them in school. J.E. Armstrong, "Limited Segregation," School Review 14 (1906), pp. 726-738, and "The Advantages of Limited Sex

Segregation in the High School," School Review 18 (1910), pp. 339-350.

39. Michelle Stanworth, Gender and Schooling, London: Hutchinson, 1983, p. 38.

40. R. R. Dale, Mixed or Single-Sex School? Vol. III, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

41. M. B. Omerod, Subject preferences and choice in co-educational and single-sex schools, British Journal of Educational Psychology 45(1975), pp. 257-267.

42. Eileen M. Byrne, Women and Education, London: Tavistock, 1978. See also Jennifer Shaw, "Schooling for girls, or mixed schooling--a mixed blessing?" in Schooling for Women's Work, Rosemary Deem, ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

43. Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools of Chicago, 1926, p. 113.

44. Interviews: Mary O'Malley (class of 1938), Nov. 10, 1983; Wilma Johanan Cruz (class of 1949), Sept. 6, 1983; Thirlene Bronaugh Harris (class of 1960), Oct. 27, 1983.

45. The Perennial (school yearbook), 1939.

46. The first woman principal of a coeducational Chicago high school was Genevieve Melody, appointed in 1925. By 1933-34 six of the thirty-four high school principals in the city were women. This proportion remained essentially unchanged for the following fifty years. Illinois School Directory, 1925-26, 1933-34; Directory of the Chicago Public Schools.

47. Interviews: Katherine Marchucci DiCanio (class of 1938), Nov. 11, 1983; Elain Skalla Kramer (class of 1948), Nov. 10, 1983; Mary Cavallo (class of 1949), Aug. 16, 1983.